

The Schmooze **Stories with a Yiddish Twist**

ASSORTED “CHACHKELES” IN WOLF POINT, MONTANA

Note: A “chachke” or “tchotchke”, according to Sol Steinmetz, is a borrowing from the Eastern Yiddish tshatshke, which came from the obsolete Polish czazko, meaning “knickknack, trinket, toy.” Today, it also means anything superelegant or ornate, a girl who fools around or lets males take liberties, a sexy but brainless female, and a kept woman. According to Leo Rosten, a certain avenue on New York’s West Side was once called “Tsatske Row.”

by
Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe



Syosset, New York

Wolf Point, Montana, zip code 59201, is a city in and the county seat of Roosevelt County, Montana. The population was 2,621 at the 2010 census. It’s the home of the annual Wild Horse Stampede, held every year during the second weekend of July.

Wolf Point’s Wild Horse Stampede is the “eltst” (oldest) rodeo in Montana and has been called the “Granddaddy of Montana Rodeos.”

William Least Heat-Moon wrote about the night he spent there in his autobiographical book, “Blue Highways: A Journey in America.” And in the fictional Marvel Comics Universe the superhero Red Wolf (William Taltrees) was born in a Wolf Point located on a Cheyenne reservation.

What’s there to do in Wolf Point? One can visit Dad’s Bar and Grill or Missouri Breaks Brewing Stockman’s 220 Club. There’s a Christian Book Store, a thrift shop, a Dakota Dollar Plus budget discount store, a hardware store, convenience store, bank, barber-beautyshop, and a food bank. And--would you believe it--Wolf Point is home to JAKE’S BIBLES

& HEBREW COLLECTIBLES.

This anecdote is based on a true story:

TZITZIT...IN WOLF POINT, MONTANA

Judy Posen was headed for a scrabble tournament in Minneapolis and decided to make the excursion into a road trip. She set out from Seattle heading east, with her scrabble board, scrabble dictionary, road maps and a friend - a fellow scrabble friend.

On Day 2, after four hours of driving, Judy and her friend Robin decided to take a break in the next town they came across. That's how they found themselves in Wolf Point, Montana.

They drove slowly through town, in search of a place to buy a soda, when suddenly Judy caught sight of a dusty sign reading,

JAKE'S BIBLES & HEBREW COLLECTIBLES.

She couldn't resist. "Let's drop in for a moment," she said to Robin. "This looks like a must."

Stepping into the dank shop, they tread on creaking floorboards and breathed in air permeated with ancient ("fartsaytik") smells, borrowed from the homes of a dozen aging widows. Lining every wall were shelves stacked high with Christian bibles and overflowing with Judaica items of every size and description: menoras that hadn't known silver ("zilber") polish for over a decade, Mizrach wall decorations made of macrame and set in dark wooden frames, Star of David pendants under a heavy glass jewelry counter and row upon row of assorted chachkeles.

Judy and Robin exchanged baffled glances. Then the hanging double doors leading from the backroom swung, and in came a portly figure, an amalgamation of Dustbowl farmer and 18th-century Polish chassid.* On his head a yarmulke rested snugly and tzitzit dangled at his waist ("tayle"). A wool tzitzit garment ("malbush") worn over his shirt was held to his portly belly by a pair of overall straps.

Judy collected herself. "Would you happen to have a blue tallit with silver stripes?" she inquired, trying to sound natural.

“No, ma’am,” said the proprietor, “but perhaps I could interest y’all in a messianic tallith, 100% virgin wool (“vol”)?”

“Sorry, that’s not quite what I had in mind,” Judy replied. She motioned to Robin and they went out into the bright midday sun (“zun”).

As they drove out of town, Robin asked her friend to confirm the surreal scene they had beheld. “Was that really a tallit katan and tzitzit the storekeeper had on?”

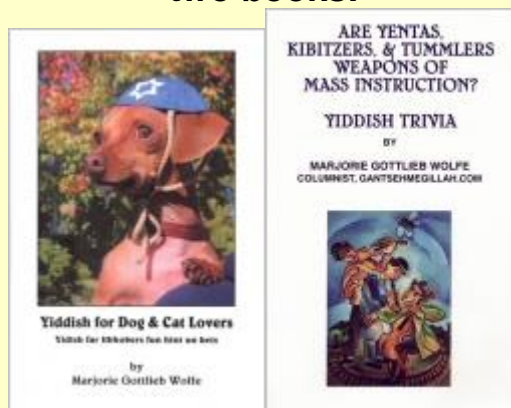
“You bet your bootstraps.”

Source: Ben’s Tallit Shop, 2015, posted on January 14, 2014

*A “chassid” or “chasic” (pronounced KHA-sid) must be rattled as if clearing fishbones out of your palate. In Hebrew it means “pious one.” The Hasidic men are usually fully bearded, with peyes, usually wearing a broad-brimmed “shvarts” (black) hat, a white shirt, no necktie/ kravat, and a long black coat.

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com

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